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New York

President:	Mr. Ramírez Carreño	(Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of))
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 3.50 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting. On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. De Mistura, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: On behalf of the Secretary-General, I hope to soon welcome the adoption of a draft resolution that will help all of us address an issue that we have been jointly working on for at least the past three weeks. We have come a long way since the first meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in Vienna on 30 October 2015. Much has transpired since I last briefed the Council on 5 February, the day that I suspended the inter-Syrian talks in the light of the positions articulated by the parties and the lack of progress on the ground.

Three weeks later, and as a result of the heavy lifting done by members of the ISSG, particularly of the co-Chairs of the two task forces that were formed in Munich on 12 February, aid has been delivered in the past 10 days to almost 110,000 people, and 200 trucks are moving inside Syria in order to reach six locations. The first World Food Programme test air-drop in Deir ez-Zour has also taken place in order to reach an area where there are about 230,000 people under siege by Daesh.

Perhaps most importantly, we have had a provisional agreement on the terms of a cessation of hostilities in Syria, as announced by the Russian and United States co-Chairs at the beginning of this week. The cessation of hostilities is in fact meant to come into effect about an hour from now at midnight Damascus time. This meeting therefore has a special significance on this hopefully exceptional day and night for the Syrians. Consequently, with your permission, Sir, I will give the Council a rather unorthodox briefing. Rather than walking Council members through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2016), concerning which Council members already have the Secretary-General's letter of 17 February (S/2016/152), I would rather focus on the post-Munich developments, many unfolding almost in real time.

As an outcome of the ISSG meeting in Munich, we now have specific obligations for the ISSG members and the Syrians to fulfil. There are now a mechanism in place to that effect, an agreed set of actions and an immediate timetable and timeline. Council members have just deliberated on a draft resolution that, I hope, that will endorse all those steps. Let me give them an idea of the hard work that will have brought us to this stage once the Council has adopted the draft resolution.

First, on the issue of sustained humanitarian access and a humanitarian task force, the Council is well aware of the detailed briefings on the overall grave humanitarian situation in Syria. Over the past month alone, the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/862); the report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (A/HRC/30/48); as well as the letter of the Secretary-General of 17 February have painted quite a tragic and harrowing picture of the desperate conditions of civilians — including many women, children and sick persons — in communities across Syria that are besieged by the Government, by the opposition or by Daesh. To that, we should add the unprecedented level of internal displacement and the growing number of Syrians embarking on an often fatal journey across land and sea to seek safety and asylum in Europe and elsewhere.

Humanitarian issues have taken a centre stage in the latest ISSG deliberations in Munich leading to the establishment of the ISSG task force on humanitarian access, which has already met three times since 12 February. My Office, including my Senior Adviser on Humanitarian Issues, Jan Egeland, and the United Nations country team in Damascus, led by United Nations Resident Coordinator Yacoub El Hillo, have worked hard, together with implementing partners such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to generate a humanitarian plan, as requested by ISSG. In the

first instance, urgently needed humanitarian aid was delivered to the besieged areas identified in the Munich statement: Madaya, Zabadani, Moadamiya, Kafr Batna — which is part of eastern Ghouta — Kafraya and Foah.

Thanks to the prompt operational response of our World Food Programme colleagues and the generosity of ISSG members such as Germany, the United States and the Netherlands, as well as technical support offered by the Russian Federation, we also witnessed the first test-run of air drops in a difficult environment, such as that of Deir ez-Zour. We believe that to date, the task force members have lived up to the commitment they made in Munich by using their influence with the parties to ensure an increased flow of assistance — not enough, but quite an increased flow.

Those remarkable efforts were not without difficulties or ongoing serious delays. That is why the task force is addressing those, and we will be working on them. We are still waiting for the approval of an aid delivery for an additional 170,000 people in the besieged areas. The simplifcation of approval procedures by the Government still has some way to go and has yet to occur, but we are working on that matter. A constructive meeting took place yesterday between Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhdad and our own team on the issue. We hope to see the results soon. I personally addressed that issue with the Syrian Government myself during my visit to Damascus last week. I will continue to follow up on these matters very closely because they are of vital importance and they are a follow-up to the Munich commitments.

Regarding the cessation of hostilities in Syria and the ISSG ceasefire task force, less than three hours ago I joined the Russian Federation and United States co-Chairs in the first meeting of the ISSG ceasefire task force in this very room from which I am addressing the Council. In the presence of the ISSG members, the two co-Chairs, who have been working all week with partners in reaching out to the other parties on the ground, have outlined the terms for the cessation of hostilities in Syria announced on 22 February in a joint press release by the Russian Federation and the United States. Today, the two co-Chairs today noted that the principal Syrian parties have announced their willingness to participate in the cessation of hostilities beginning midnight Damascus time, which is basically less than one hour from now.

Armed opposition groups have announced their commitment to, first, fully implementing resolution 2254 (2015) and participating — I repeat, participating — in the United Nations-facilitated political negotiations. This time we want them to stay there and not to move from there until we have gone through at least the first phase of negotiations. Secondly, they will cease their attacks with any weapons, including rockets, mortars and anti-tank guided missiles, against the Syrian armed forces and any forces associated with them. Thirdly, they will refrain from acquiring or seeking to acquire territory from other parties to the agreement. Fourthly, they will allow humanitarian access. Fifthly, they will use proportionate force, which means not unless required to address an immediate threat and if and when responding in self-defence.

At the same time, the Syrian armed forces and other forces associated with them have committed to abiding by exactly the same points. That means ceasing attacks with any weapons, including aerial bombardment by the Syrian Air Force or Russian aerospace forces against the armed opposition groups that are party to the cessation of hostilities.

The ceasefire task force will oversee the cessation of hostilities under the co-chairship of Russia and the United States. Its primary functions will include, first, delineation of the territory held by Da'esh, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other organizations designated by the Security Council as terrorist that are not part of the cessation of hostilities. Secondly, it will issue communications to promote compliance with the de-escalation of tensions. Thirdly, it will assess the nature and credibility of incoming reports of non-compliance in order to determine response measures. Fourthly, it will determine and address patterns of persistent non-compliance before referring the matter to senior officials or a higher level.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations will support those efforts in a secretariat capacity and through a so-called permanent alert centre, better described as an operations centre — a few metres from here, by the way — which will be fielding and disseminating information to the co-Chairs in the wider ISSG. In turn, we, the United Nations, are not expected to characterize, assess and/or de-conflict information received, a function that will remain with the co-Chairs, which are the Russian Federation and the United States, in consultation with other ISSG members. The cessation of hostilities

agreement, preceded by lengthy and detailed discussions in Geneva and the capitals and the outcome of intense consultations and negotiations, including at the highest level, is in itself a major achievement, and I think the Security Council will recognize that. The communication of the commitment on the part of the Syrian parties, essential to ending the war, is also a very important step.

In this room today, the task force members agreed to reach out to their respective contacts among the Syrian parties to explain the functioning of the task force, ensure the confidentiality of the discussions within the task force itself and refrain from making public comments about non-compliance reports under review, in order to give enough time for such non-compliance to be addressed. My Office, as the secretariat of the task force, will issue periodic public briefings on the task force's behalf on the status of the cessation of hostilities. Today's draft resolution also sets clear reporting requirements. Other parts of the United Nations system will obviously retain their own ability to comment on the situation in Syria within their own mandates, but the briefings will be done here.

The initial indication of consent by the parties to the conflict is indeed encouraging, but what we need now is for the parties to abide by the terms of the agreement. We have much work ahead of us to ensure the agreement's implementation, and the international community, the ISSG and the Syrian parties must remain steadfast in their own resolve. The draft resolution that we hope will be adopted shortly is, we hope, a further manifestation of the ISSG's commitment to delivering the parties to the agreement. Tomorrow, Saturday — starting at midnight tonight, in fact — will be critical. There will undoubtedly be no shortage of attempts to undermine the process. We are ready for them. We should not be impressed or overly concerned and should realize that this is part of any ceasefire and certainly of a cessation of hostilities.

The onus, however, remains with the co-Chairs, the relevant members of the ceasefire task force and all of us to work fast to defuse any tension that may arise from potential crossed wires, disinformation or incidents. The parties will have to show restraint in cases where there are still discrepancies in information on the presence and affiliation of groups. Daraya is a case in point. For our part, we will do all we can to support that important effort. My teams, both in Geneva and Damascus, will be on a rotating duty as of midnight tonight to follow up on it.

In adopting resolution 2254 (2015), the Council made it abundantly clear that only a negotiated political solution can bring an end to this horrible five-year conflict. The resolution also acknowledged that there is a close link between a nation-wide ceasefire and a parallel political process, and confidence in a political process will indeed increase the prospects of a ceasefire. We all know it, and the people of Syria have been telling and reminding us about it. In turn, a reduction in violence will help create conditions conducive to negotations, and progress on a cessation of hostilities will drastically improve the conditions on the ground, which in turn will lead to a significant scaling up of humanitarian deliveries across Syria. As the Secretary-General concluded in his letter to the Council, the agreement reached in Munich represents a precious opportunity for a speedy and credible resumption of intra-Syrian talks.

Assuming, therefore, that, God willing, the cessation of hostilities largely holds and the humanitarian access continues unabated, I intend to reconvene — based on consultation with the Secretary-General and hopefully with the Council's approval — the intra-Syrian talks on Monday, 7 March, with the same representatives of the Syrian Government in opposition, as well as the groups of individuals associated with the Moscow and Cairo meetings. As I told the parties at the outset of the talks on 29 January, the agenda remains exactly the same. It is based on resolution 2254 (2015), which aims for a comprehensive political settlement through negotiations on a political transition process pursuant to the Geneva final communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

It is therefore my intention to focus on the core issues defined by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015): securing agreements on credible, inclusive, non-sectarian governance, a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution, and elements and a schedule for holding fair and free parliamentary and presidential elections on the basis of that new constitution. We have to build on the momentum that has emerged since Munich to help the parties reach an agreement on these matters in the shortest possible time. I am counting on the ISSG, but also the Security Council, to ensure that the parties come to Geneva again, this time ready to engage, to stay and to stay engaged on the substantive issues. I hope that the draft resolution that the Council

may be adopting shortly will send a good signal in that direction.

While the primary focus of the talks is governance, I also intend to ensure that pressing confidence-building aspects that matter most to the Syrian people will continue to be addressed, including the release of any arbitrarily detained people, in particular women and children and individuals who have been kept hostage. I am also bound by the resolution 2254 (2015) to ensure the participation of the broadest spectrum of Syrians.

As I mentioned in my last briefing, in addition to consulting with representatives of the Government and the opposition, I have consulted and will continue to consult with civil society representatives and women — Syrian women. They make a remarkable contribution and need to continue to make a remarkable contribution to our work. I will continue this practice. Since the recess of the talks, both the Civil Society Support Room, which is a platform aimed at facilitating the participation of civil society organizations in Geneva, and the Syrian Women's Advisory Board have continued their preparations. They will continue doing so and help us — and help me to do my job. Furthermore, UN Women, which has worked closely with us over recent months, has seconded a gender adviser to my office to support both my work and that of the Women's Advisory Board.

In conclusion, we have so far, together, maintained the ISSG momentum. It now needs to be sustained. Both task forces are making progress — admittedly, not enough — but progress that would have been unimaginable just two months ago. The outcomes from both are first good steps — a first step towards sustained and unimpeded access throughout Syria in terms of humanitarian aid, and a first step towards, hopefully, a more durable nationwide ceasefire. I cannot overemphasize how important, determined and sustained political will is the good-faith implementation of the cessation of hostilities for making this agreement fixed.

On the humanitarian issue, it is essential not to lose focus. Our position remains clear — all sieges must end. The United Nations and other humanitarian partners must be granted unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access without preconditions, and civilians must be allowed freedom of movement. The ongoing support of the ISSG and of the Security Council remain therefore critical.

As for the cessation of hostilities, which we hope will be respected, it will not only create conditions conducive to the resumption of meaningful negotiations, but it will also and above all send a long-awaited signal of hope to the Syrian people that after five years of conflict there may be an end and a hope of an end to their suffering. These are all sentiments reinforced by ISSG members in today's meeting and just endorsed, I hope, by the Security Council through the adoption of resolution 2268 (2016).

On all these aspects, the United Nations is ready and present to provide support. The Secretary-General has confirmed it, and I reiterate it once again on his behalf. Everyone should do his or her share; we will do ours. Critical fault lines are being addressed now carefully and cautiously, be it which groups will be participating in the cessation of hostilities or which areas are being opened to access and how and on what priority basis. This will remain a complicated, painstaking process, but we should not give up since nothing is impossible, especially at this moment.

Going forward, I will continue to heavily count on the ISSG to resolve any possible ambiguities related to the talks as they arise and will keep the Council fully informed on progress as I have done before. Resolution 2254 (2015) was a ray of hope and a moment of hope that remains ongoing. It unanimously expressed the international community's grave concern at the continued suffering of the Syrians, the persistent and brutal violence and the perverse impact of terrorist and violent extremist ideology.

We are now at the crossroads and we have the possibility of turning the page in the Syrian conflict after almost six years of one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent memory. It is potentially a historic juncture, bringing an end to the killing and destruction and giving new life with renewed hope to the Syrians.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing and for his work.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/185, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the Russian Federation and the United States of America. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2268 (2016).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and for his dogged efforts — no matter how many obstacles are put in his way — to seek a way out for the people of Syria from this abysmal conflict.

We are gathered here at a critical moment. Resolution 2268 (2016), which we have just adopted and in which the Security Council endorses the cessation of hostilities in Syria, offers a genuine opportunity for a pause, at least in part, in the fighting in one of the most brutal conflicts the world has seen in a generation, a conflict that for the past five years the Security Council and the international community have been unable to stop. This resolution endorses a set of practical, concrete steps, along with terms to which the parties to the conflict must commit, to reduce the violence and create space for a long overdue political transition.

There is some scepticism as to whether this cessation of hostilities, which is scheduled to go into effect in less than an hour, at midnight Damascus time, will be respected from the outset or, just as important, whether it will hold with time. That scepticism is more than reasonable, given previous efforts that the Council and other multilateral institutions have undertaken to try to stop the monstrous violence and immeasurable suffering experienced by the Syrian people. Yet that record does not change the fact that this is our best chance to reduce the violence. Today, as in every previous effort, the only measure that matters is not the words on the page of this resolution, but whether these commitments are actually put into practice and whether these commitments lead to real changes on the ground.

For that to happen, first and foremost, the parties to the conflict must abide by the terms endorsed today. To that end, the United States has continued to consult closely with the major Syrian armed opposition groups, which have confirmed their acceptance of the terms of the cessation of hostilities through the High Negotiations Committee or directly with us. The vast majority among them are ready to participate in the cessation provided the Syrian Government, and the Governments and forces supporting it, abide by their commitments under the terms. We are therefore deeply concerned by the continued Syrian and Russian aerial bombardment of towns across Syria, aerial bombing that has caused massive displacement and hundreds of civilian deaths. Many of the towns being hit by Syrian and Russian bombers are towns such as Daraya, a suburb of Damascus that is being pummelled up to this very day, a town that is not held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or the Al-Nusra Front. It is hard to seem serious and sincere about ceasing hostilities when you ramp up fighting right up to the minute the cessation of hostilities is to take effect.

Secondly, those countries with influence on the parties must use it to press the parties to live up to their commitments. And thirdly, when violations occur, as inevitably they will, a sober, coordinated response is critical. The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) has set up a task force assigned specific steps to address allegations of non-compliance, including working with parties to de-escalate violence that could quickly spiral out of control.

Let us be real. It is going to be extremely challenging, especially at the outset, to make this work. In a world of horrific crises, arguably no crisis has done more to threaten international peace and security or has inflicted as much human suffering as the conflict in Syria. We are all now broken records here in the Council about the fact that this crisis cannot be resolved through force alone and that it will require a political solution. We have heard it; we have said it. But today we have an opportunity. If we can make this cessation of hostilities hold, which is a very big if, we will take a genuine step towards that political solution we have been talking about for so long.

As we all know, if implemented, a cessation of hostilities would not apply to terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which will continue to fight. Yet even a partial de-escalation would make a real difference in the lives of Syrians, and it would also allow us to expand the reach of humanitarian access, which, despite the modest gains that have been made in recent days and weeks, is extremely limited

and extremely inadequate, particularly when it comes to hard-to-reach or besieged areas, where people continue to starve to death and die of treatable illnesses owing to a lack of medicine. Man-made starvation continues, man-made deaths, because medicine is being stripped from convoys. Regular, sustained and unimpeded access must be granted to all Syrians in need, no matter where they live.

A cessation of hostilities will also help foster conditions in which Special Envoy De Mistura could reconvene talks between the parties in Geneva, which is crucial to working towards the political transition that offers the only long-term solution to Syria's conflict. That transition, as we have said all along, must be a transition away from Bashar Al-Assad, who has lost all legitimacy to lead. As President Obama said yesterday, it is clear that after years of his barbaric war against his own people, including torture and barrel bombs and sieges and starvation, many Syrians will never stop fighting until Al-Assad is out of power.

The cessation will not itself ensure that a political solution is reached, but it does at least create conditions in which one is possible. Beyond respecting the cessation, the parties can take other meaningful steps to build confidence, starting by releasing detainees, especially women and children, who continue to be subjected to deplorable treatment and inhumane conditions.

Let me conclude. All are aware that on 11 February the ISSG issued its statement in Munich, which set out the initial terms of the cessation of hostilities that is supposed to go into effect shortly. Not long after the statement was issued, a group of around a dozen Syrians huddled in the rain outside a checkpoint in the town of Kilis, along Turkey's border with Syria. The men are just a handful of the nearly 4.5 million Syrians who have fled their country since the conflict began. These Syrians were actually waiting to go back into Syria in hopes of retrieving their families and bringing them to safety in Turkey. A journalist asked them if they thought that the deal reached in Munich would actually lead to a pause in the violence, No, they all said, without hesitation. One of the men, a 25-year-old named Faisal, who would not give his full name out of fear that his loved ones still in Syria could be harmed as a result, said of the ISSG statement, "The deals they make there are so isolated and detached from this reality here". Whether this effort at a cessation of hostilities helps to change that reality, the reality on the ground for people like Faisal and so many millions of Syrians who have been through what no human being should ever have to endure, whether that happens depends in significant part on what the nations in this Chamber do when the cessation begins less than an hour from now.

It is true that our actions alone will not determine whether or not the cessation of hostilities holds. Even if we all act in good faith, other parties have to power to sabotage the cessation by their actions. Yet it is also true that the failure by any one of our nations to live up to our part of the deal, which includes working to ensure that the commitments made are honoured, pressing on the parties within our respective spheres of influence and making sure that sober, united steps are taken to de-escalate violations when they occur, could also result in the failure of the cessation. If this collapses,we will lose the most tangible opportunity we have had in a very long time to reduce the suffering of the Syrian people and to create space for finding a political solution that will finally bring them peace. So much depends on what we do. Let us not squander this chance.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Today another important collective step has been taken towards achieving a political solution to the conflict in Syria. The Security Council, in the resolution that it has just adopted — resolution 2268 (2016) — endorsed the joint statement of the Russian Federation and the United States of America as the co-Chairs of the International Syrian Support Group on the cessation of hostilities in that country, on conditions that are part and parcel of that joint statement.

This document and the resolution that has been adopted, which Russia co-sponsored, must be implemented strictly and without any preconditions. The process of implementation itself must be monitored reliably. What is important is that the resolution was adopted at almost exactly the same moment as the cessation of hostilities is entering into force in Syria. Many armed groups in Syria have already declared that they are ready to comply with its provisions.

As was confirmed in the joint statement, the cessation of hostilities regime will not apply to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat Al-Nusra or other terrorist organizations that have been recognized as such by the Security Council. The combat against them will continue. Our position is that the long-term stabilization of Syria will be impossible without eliminatimg the terrorist threat in that country.

To achieve that goal, it is essential to put an end to efforts to use terrorists as a weapon for suspect geopolitical aims. All sources of supply to the terrorists must be shut down reliably. At the Syrian border we must prevent illegal flows, which allow criminal groups to prosper and thrive. We need to put an end to the continuing infringement of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria by external forces.

The joint actions agreed with the United States can contribute to making this a real turning point in the Syrian crisis, which has gone on for far too long. We now have a real chance to end the violence and to step up our collective combat against terrorism and improve the very serious humanitarian situation in the country. Of vital importance is the fact that we are creating new conditions for developing the political process under the auspices of the United Nations and that the main role will be played by the Syrians themselves. That process should ensure a meaningful role for the Syrians that did not leave their homeland during the many years of conflict, in particular the Kurdish population, which is one of the key elements in the counter-terrorist efforts. In other words, it should ensure a meaningful role for all the representatives of the ethnic and religious components of Syrian society.

We understand that this process will be difficult and complex given how entrenched the conflict has become and the various efforts to derail the initial progress. However, inter-Syrian negotiations must be resumed as soon as possible and we should move forward on all the remaining aspects of the agenda. In fact, the resolution we have just adopted affirms that. We hope that the United Nations will be impartial and principled in its support of this process and that Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will play a constructive role.

At the same time, we need to be firmly committed to all provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the other foundational documents. We should not single out individual components of those documents in order to take advantage of the changing situation on the ground or to benefit the selfish priorities of any particular opposition group. Any measure that could derail the political process by establishing preconditions should be rejected. We should not be at the beck and call of radicals, but rather should urge them to engage in dialogue. At the same time, we must end the harmful practice of providing external support to armed groups. That has had a very negative impact on the political process and threatens the future of the cessation of hostilities.

We expect the Syrian actors, the States of the region and the entire international community to act responsibly and implement the whole range of decisions on the Syrian political solution. The cornerstone of this process should be the interests of the Syrian people. We cannot squander this historic opportunity.

Russia has consistently supported a political solution to the conflict in Syria. Through our joint efforts, we launched the Vienna process and established the International Syria Support Group. We supported some of the most important foundational decisions of the Security Council on this conflict. We believe that the groundwork laid today for constructive cooperation will be essential to success on the path towards a peaceful solution.

In a broader context, we should discuss the possibility of developing a comprehensive strategy for political stabilization and the socioeconomic rebuilding of the Middle East region and North Africa. The solution to the challenges that the region is facing must be collective. The proposals of the Russian Federation to initiate broad-based cooperation in that area remain as valid as ever.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt wishes to thank all the members of the Security Council for their constructive engagement in dealing with one of the most important issues in the Arab world, namely, the Syrian crisis. We also wish to pay a special tribute to both the Russian Federation and the United States of America for their efforts that led to the announcement of the cessation of hostilities in Syria, which represents progress towards a ceasefire. This initiative has been strongly supported by Egypt in the framework of the International Syria Support Group. Resolution 2268 (2016), adopted today, provides it with a legal framework and support.

We stress the need for all parties to the conflict on the ground — Syrian and non-Syrian alike, be they involved either directly or indirectly in the conflict — to cease their hostilities at the time specified in the resolution. We also stress that any party that chooses not to abide by the cessation of hostilities agreement or the Council's resolution, or would violate that agreement, should alone bear the grave consequences of that action.

Egypt welcomes the cessation of hostilities agreement and today's resolution. We welcome their stress on the need to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria and to combat terrorist organizations. In that context, we affirm that a political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to freedom and democracy and maintains the unity, sovereignty and institutions of Syria, in line with the communiqués of the International Syria Support Group and resolution 2254 (2015), is the only way to an end the humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people and enable Syrian State institutions to eliminate terrorism.

Egypt therefore welcomes the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, which have just begun through proximity talks with the Syrian Government and opposition groups in Geneva. We call on the Special Envoy to resume those talks as soon as possible and to finalize the arrangements for the resumption of United Nations-facilitated formal negotiations between the Government and the broadest possible spectrum of the Syrian opposition, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015), which provides for a clear plan of action that is binding for all parties. All partners present on Syrian territory and all parts of Syrian society must participate in that process in order to maintain Syria's unity.

We therefore reiterate the need for the entire Syrian opposition to be represented at the formal negotiations, as set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). Those must include the Arab and Kurdish groups engaged in combating terrorism, especially the terrorism of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front in northern Syria. It is important to underscore that those groups have already made significant gains by liberating large areas from the grip of terrorists.

The armed conflict in Syria has assumed unimaginable dimensions. The Syrian people have been bearing the unbearable. Now is the time to put intentions to the test. It is time for accountability. I call on all parties without exception to stop attempting to please the warring parties at the expense of the Syrian people. I call on all parties to work to empower the Syrian people to take control of their future without foreign intervention.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2268 (2016), which endorses the cessation of hostilities agreement in Syria, which will enter into force in less than one hour. France has lent its full support to the adoption of the resolution, which offers hope for an immediate improvement of the situation of the Syrian people.

Throughout the nearly five years of the Syrian crisis, France's position has remained constant in support of the primacy of diplomacy over war in order to find a political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. For four months and since the first meeting in Vienna in October 2015, France has fully supported the diplomatic process that enabled the establishment of the International Syria Support Group, the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) and the beginning in January of formal inter-Syrian negotiations under the auspices of the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

France wants to see a process that will lead to tangible results for the Syrian people, not a process for the sake of a process. It certainly does not wish to see a process that would merely serve as a smokescreen to hide a military escalation, the main victims of which would be the civilian population and moderate opposition. We are of the firm belief, which was solidly and explicitly recalled by the Secretary-General in his letter of 17 February to the Security Council (S/2016/152), that as long as Syrians see no difference in their daily lives the negotiations will have no credibility. In that context, the cessation of hostilities agreed by the United States and Russia on 12 February should be welcomed as a contribution to the de-escalation and a step towards the settlement of the Syrian conflict. France, as I have said, fully supported the adoption of resolution 2268 (2016) endorsing the parameters of the cessation of hostilities.

This milestone is both a sign of hope and a test. It represents the hope that, for the first time, Syrians will see a decrease in the violence and bombings that haunt their daily lives, and a test of the good faith of the parties on the ground, including foreign Powers, that have accepted the cessation of hostilities. The role of the Security Council is therefore to support without hesitation anything that might lead to a lasting reduction in violence. However, the Council should also be realistic and exacting. As such, everything must be done to implement the agreement on the ground. To that end, France deems it necessary to exercise the utmost vigilance on two points.

First, the implementation of the agreement should be closely monitored, as mistrust between the parties on the ground has never been higher. In that regard, we recall that only those terrorist groups explicitly

designated by the United Nations are excluded from the cessation of hostilities. Strict interpretation of that point should be observed as, without it, peace cannot be established. The International Syria Support Group task force, which will report to the Security Council, will be the collective judge of its implementation. As long as the parties to the conflict remain the sole judges of violations and the resumption of hostilities, the whole structure will remain fragile.

The second point concerns attaining an effective and sustainable reduction in violence. In order for the inter-Syrian Geneva negotiations to resume on a credible foundation, we must ensure that the obligations recalled in resolution 2254 (2015) and the Munich communiqué — in particular the full, safe, unhindered and unconditional access of humanitarian assistance to affected populations — are fully implemented. As the Secretary-General himself indicated in his letter of 17 February, negotiations can succeed only if based on a credible and solid foundation. It will be up to the Special Envoy to determine whether these conditions are met on 7 March. The resumption of talks will be possible only if the commitments undertaken are scrupulously applied by the regime and the outside Powers that support it. In that regard, we are very concerned about the intensified bombings carried out by Syrian and Russian armed forces right up to the final hours before the entry into force of the cessation of hostilities.

France will encourage the opposition High Negotiations Committee to return to the inter-Syrian negotiation table as soon as the full and lasting implementation of international obligations has been noted, in particular humanitarian access to all besieged areas, as well as the effective implementation of the cessation of hostilities. The High Negotiations Committee is a major stakeholder and plays an essential role in the success of the negotiations. In that context, we deeply regret that it is not mentioned in the text of the resolution, whereas it enjoys and should retain our support.

If the cessation of hostilities holds, an initial step will have been made towards a settlement to the Syrian crisis. Nevertheless, as long as the cessation of hostilities is not supported by political progress towards a transition consistent with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), it will remain fragile and reversible. In other words, the cessation of hostilities, which is fragile by nature, should move towards a ceasefire, which is more durable.

Resolution 2254 (2015) sets clear objectives. Allow me to briefly recall its terms. A ceasefire can take place only alongside a political process that includes the implementation of the first stages of the transition. When the inter-Syrian negotiations between the regime and the negotiators of the High Negotiations Committee resume, the parties should begin to formulate the terms of a compromise in order to set up a transitional authority with full executive powers, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué. France will continue to contribute fully to the diplomatic efforts of the Council and the International Syria Support Group with a view to allowing diplomacy prove its effectiveness for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing.

Not long ago, the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) held its fourth foreign ministers' meeting in Munich, and took the important decision to expand the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria, stop the hostilities and to quickly resume the Geneva talks. Positive results were achieved at the meeting. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi led a delegation to the meeting and made an important contribution to its outcome. Recently, Russia and the United States reached an agreement on cessation of hostilities in Syria, which China appreciates. That agreement demonstrates that the consensus reached at the fourth ISSG foreign ministers' meeting has been implemented.

Today the Council has unanimously adopted resolution 2268 (2016), endorsing the agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Syria. That demonstrates the international community's support for the diplomatic efforts of the ISSG members and its firm commitment to a political settlement of the Syrian question. China welcomes this development. Political settlement is the only way out of the Syrian crisis. No matter what the circumstances, it is imperative to stay the course of a political settlement. The international community should take the important opportunity represented by the Council's endorsement of the agreement on a cessation of hostilities in Syria to more vigorously push for the implementation of the existing and important consensus.

First, the relevant parties in Syria should strictly implement the agreement on cessation of hostilities, put an end to fighting and violence within the stipulated time

frame, and speed up humanitarian access to relevant Syrian areas so as to create conditions favourable to the prompt resumption of the Geneva talks.

Secondly, the relevant parties in Syria should strictly implement resolution 2254 (2015) and the consensus reached at the fourth ISSG foreign ministers' meeting, put the interests of the country and people first, and quickly resume talks so as to place the destiny and future of Syria firmly into the hands of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, major countries in the region should stop their mutual finger-pointing and instead take concrete action to prevent the deterioration of the situation, and play a constructive role in the forthcoming implementation of the cessation of hostilities and efforts to expand humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, the international community, including ISSG members, should put peace in Syria and the region first, assume their respective responsibilities and play their due roles in the effective implementation of the consensus reached at the fourth foreign ministers' meeting and resolution 2254 (2015).

China greatly appreciates the mediation efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura and firmly supports the United Nations role as the main channel of mediation in the political resolution of the Syrian question. China stands ready to maintain its positive and constructive role in the political settlement of the Syrian question.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing today and for all of his sterling work in such challenging circumstances.

The United Kingdom welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2268 (2016), endorsing the agreement on a cessation of hostilities in Syria. I want to join others in welcoming the cooperation between the United States and Russia that made this agreement possible. If implemented fully, this agreement could be the most significant step forward in the past five years, a step that brings us closer to an end to the violence and one that brings the conclusion of this conflict into sight, bringing about hope for a political transition. I therefore welcome Special Envoy De Mistura's decision to reconvene rapidly political negotiations on transition, in Geneva on 7 March. It is vital that we seize the impetus created by this agreement. But as set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/152) on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), there are a number of actions still outstanding that need to be taken forward to maximize the prospects for successful negotiations.

First, the task force must agree a transparent monitoring and verification process for the cessation of hostilities, and, in the future, for a ceasefire. Secondly, additional confidence-building measures are still required to show the regime's commitment to the political process. Those must include the release of arbitrarily detained people, especially women and children. Thirdly, we need to see a complete end to the obstruction of medical supplies to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. That practice is completely unacceptable. As we heard in the briefing from Stephen O'Brien (see S/PV.7631) on Wednesday, there has been a significant resumption of humanitarian aid access to besieged areas, and that is welcome. But it is long-overdue, and it is clear that there remain significant needs, including reaching areas of eastern Ghuta. We must begin to see that in the coming days.

There is so much more to do. Russia must turn words into actions and use its unique influence on the Al-Assad regime, its affiliated militias and other backers to abide by this agreement. If they do, some much-needed confidence will be brought to our hopes for a political settlement; if they do not, we will falter again and the spiral of violence will continue. We should not forget that 1,380 civilians have been killed and 5,789 injured by Russian and regime airstrikes since Russia began its campaign in Syria, including attacks on at least three camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. For all our optimism today, we must therefore recognize that the cessation of hostilities is an overdue milestone. Rather than dwell on our past failures, let us now seize the momentum and see urgent progress aimed at a political transition — away from Al-Assad — and a Government that represents all Syrians. That is the only way to end the longer-term conflict, and in doing so allow us to defeat the Da'esh threat.

Finally, I would like to make clear the United Kingdom's position that it is the Syrian High Negotiations Commission that must represent the Syrian opposition in formal negotiations in Geneva. The Commission represents a broad sweep of the opposition forces fighting in Syria against the tyranny of Al-Assad. They deserve our wholehearted support, which regrettably was not reflected in this resolution.

It is crucial now that all members of the international community work in good faith to implement this resolution and resolution 2254 (2015), alongside the agreements reached in Munich. In doing so, we can ensure that this finally is the year that the bloodshed in Syria comes to an end.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): There are fewer than 10 minutes remaining before a critical moment comes and we take a first and decisive step to put an end to the war on the ground in Syria. Only a few minutes remain for the most crucial phase to begin, and Spain demands that the parties to the conflict and their allies fully comply with resolution 2268 (2016), which we have just adopted.

I am grateful for the agreement reached by the United States and the Russian Federation on the cessation of hostilities in Syria, which has allowed us to adopt this resolution today. Spain is ready to support all United Nations efforts to that end. We are confident in the work being carried out by the International Syria Support Group to the draw the map for the implementation of this agreement and to implement a supervision mechanism. In the days to come, transparency and rigour will be essential elements for the success of this endeavour. After five years of war, we face an extraordinarily complicated theatre of operations in which the slightest provocation can have consequences of enormous scale. That is why we call for strict respect of the terms agreed upon, and I reiterate that. We voted for this resolution with the conviction that it can lead us to a new phase in Syria, thereby contributing to establishing the necessary conditions to provide a political solution to the crisis. We welcome the fact that Syrian authorities and the High Negotiations Commission of the opposition have already joined the agreement.

The Secretary-General was very clear in his recent report (S/2016/152) to the Security Council on the situation in Syria. The fruitless logic of the military path has left us with more than one quarter of a million people dead, the largest humanitarian crisis of our time and a sanctuary to the terrorism of Da'esh and Al-Qaida. The sole alternative to breaking the cycle of violence of the past five years is to implement resolution 2254 (2015), which underscores the importance of the parties to the conflict to adopt confidence-building measures to contribute, first, to the viability of the political process and, secondly, to a sustained ceasefire over time. I would like to highlight two such confidence-building measures, namely, humanitarian access and the release of prisoners. Humanitarian access is already covered in the terms of the cessation of hostilities. Moreover, it is a demand that is supported by a long series of Security Council resolutions. It is indispensable for there to be continued and unhindered access. Restricting the activities of medical and surgical teams cannot be justified under any circumstances, and even less so when there is a cessation of hostilities. The Sectretary-General, on his part, has called for freedom of movement for the civilian population in besieged areas. This resolution also calls for the release of arbitrarily detained individuals, particularly women and children. All along we have asked for an end to indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population. We now trust that resolution 2268 (2016) will make it possible for us to leave behind this tragic chapter of the war in Syria.

However, we must call on the Government of Syria to protect the civilian population, while strictly complying with the standards of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Those are necessary steps to provide credibility to the parties staking everything on a political solution. The fight against terrorism cannot serve as a pretext to keep testing the process of dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations.

Resolution 2254 (2015), which we adopted unanimously barely two months ago, continues to be a valid road map in Syria. The United Nations has played the role we entrusted it. Spain has full confidence in the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, and we thank him sincerely once again for his decided action for peace in Syria. The international community is already prepared for a new scenario of reconciliation in Syria.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): It is zero hours Damascus time, 27 February. By adopting unanimously the new resolution 2268 (2016), we have endorsed in full the cessation of hostilities in Syria announced on 22 February by the United States and the Russian Federation. I welcome efforts by Secretary Kerry and Minister Lavrov, co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, which opened up an opportunity to end this long-lasting conflict. Resolution 2268 (2016) was sponsored by the Russian Federation and the United States, which I find most welcome. The adoption and implementation of resolution 2268 (2016) should lead to the full implementation of the most important resolution, namely, resolution 2254 (2015). It is my hope that the Russia-United States cooperation, as well

as cooperation among other partners, will continue and be strengthened in the process of the implementation of both resolutions.

I should now like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing as well as, most important, his tireless efforts to move the political process forward. Japan welcomes the announcement of the scheduled resumption of intra-Syrian talks on 7 March. As the Special Envoy said, the start and maintenance of the cessation of hostilities and the improvement of the dire humanitarian situation are indispensable elements for the success of those talks.

Japan has provided continuous assistance to Syria for the development of its economy and improvements in the livelihood of the people. It has always been a matter of the highest priority for Japan that the people of Syria be able to enjoy better lives. However, since the crisis began, more than a quarter of a million Syrians have been killed and 4.6 million have fled their country. Japan will continue to work with others towards a lasting political settlement by restoring confidence among the parties through assistance that benefits all Syrians, without marginalizing any groups.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join previous speakers in welcoming the timely adoption of resolution 2268 (2016). Its unanimous adoption is a testament to the resolve of the Security Council in seeking an end to the bloody conflict in Syria. We also thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing, which provided us with insight into a very crucial week for Syria, one which, hopefully, will begin to define a better future for the men, women and children of Syria.

Malaysia welcomes the announcement of the cessation of hostilities by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), which is scheduled to begin right now. We also welcome the agreement by the Government of Syria and the opposition groups in that regard. With the agreement of all parties to the cessation of hostilities, including allied forces, we now have a real opportunity to reduce violence and end the senseless brutality that the conflict has inflicted upon the Syrian people. The glimmer of hope presented to the Syrian people after much work by the Council, the ISSG and Special Envoy De Mistura over the past few weeks must be made a reality. It cannot be allowed to fail, because military escalation and the continuation of conflict can only serve to inflict more damage on both sides and to prolong the dire humanitarian crisis.

Malaysia was encouraged by the first round of peace talks held by Special Envoy De Mistura late last month. Unfortunately, the peace talks were suspended due to the continued aerial bombardment and the hindering of deliveries of humanitarian aid to people in need. The cessation of hostilities and the breakthrough in humanitarian operations last week give us fresh hope that the peace talks can be resumed. We take note of the planned resumption of talks on 7 March and call upon all the relevant parties to participate in the United Nations-facilitated talks next week. However, we would caution against moving the goalposts too often. We hope that the peace talks scheduled for next Monday will proceed. The peace talks are extremely crucial, and the only solution to the Syrian conflict is through a political settlement. The sooner the relevant key actors accept that, the sooner greater effort could be invested to find a breakthrough to end the conflict and to work for peace. We must therefore now shift our focus to the political route and work towards implementing the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We are heartened by the breakthrough made by the United Nations and its humanitarian partners in securing safe passage for humanitarian relief missions to the five besieged towns in Syria. We have also seen the United Nations carry out its first airdrop of humanitarian aid to more than 200,000 people in Deyr ez-Zour. Given that breakthrough, my delegation would reiterate that the success in delivering humanitarian relief via airdrops to the besieged areas must be replicated; it should not be a one-off event. In addition, there are other besieged areas inaccessible by humanitarian partners, and access must be granted to those places. We again call upon States with influence on the parties to the conflict to do their utmost to ensure that the sieges end and that humanitarian aid is accessible to all.

We are hopeful that the cessation of hostilities among the relevant parties to the conflict will lead us to the desperately sought-after political solution. It is incumbent upon the Council to stand united in making that happen.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this briefing on the Syrian issue, which has taken up so much of your presidency in the month of February. My delegation also thanks Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing.

In voting in favour of resolution 2268 (2016), submitted by the American and Russian delegations, my delegations has once again evidenced its commitment and contribution to the arduous search for a comprehensive, lasting solution to the terrible Syrian tragedy in its humanitarian, security and political dimensions. We welcome the spirit of cooperation shown by the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group — the United States of America and the Russian Federation — in the drafting of the resolution, which certainly represents a glimmer of hope, however tenuous, for the beleaguered Syrian people, who no longer know where to turn. The resolution is concise in that it pertains to the terms by which the cessation of hostilities is to be observed. It is now past midnight in Damascus, and we hope that the ceasefire will be effective and open up the way for other confidence-building measures as part of the political process in Syria. We welcome the fact that the resolution reiterates the priority of prusing the fight against terrorism and that, in that context, the cessation of hostilities will not apply to the terrorist groups identified by the United Nations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, in conformity with resolution 2254 (2015).

Bearing in mind the recent positive steps forward made in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to besieged and hard-to-access areas, we are also pleased to note that the resolution proposes a broad actions to respond to this dimension, particularly the facilitation of humanitarian access under the International Syria Support Group task force, as well as unimpeded access to all parts of Syria, particularly in areas listed in the text. That is why the delegation of Senegal calls on the parties concerned to fully respect the cessation of hostilities in order to strengthen other confidence-building measures aimed at achieving a ceasefire throughout Syria with the support of the international community. In addition to the exchange of information in the framework of the task force, Senegal awaits with interest specific proposals on the monitoring mechanisms which the Secretary-General is to submit to the Security Council.

In the light of all this and the need to support the actions of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and to send a strong message to the parties responsible for one of the gravest humanitarian tragedies of our time, my country decided to give its full support to resolution 2268 (2016). Once again, we thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and offer him the full support of the delegation of Senegal in his very complex and sensitive task, in the hope that the resolution we have just adopted will make his task less difficult when the inter-Syrian negotiations resume on 7 March.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Like others, we thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and his tireless efforts. The delegation of Ukraine supported resolution 2268 (2016), just adopted by the Security Council, and wholeheartedly hopes that it will serve the purpose of breaking the dangerous pattern of escalation in Syria and help to bring this conflict to an end.

At the same time, we would like to register our disagreement with the language of paragraph 4 of the resolution in the part that recognizing the efforts of the Russian Federation to reach understanding on the terms of the cessation of hostilities. In reality, it is precisely the Russian Federation's support for the Government forces in Syria that have taken the violence to a new level in recent months. Russia is now trying to impose itself as a mediator in the Syrian settlement process. Russian tactics in Syria are similar to those in eastern Ukraine. Like in Ukraine, Russia is stirring up violence in Syria, including by supplying military personnel, providing arms and ammunition, conducting combat operations and spreading false propaganda. As we speak, I have just learned from reports that, with less than one hour left until Syria's ceasefire begins, a Russian air strike just hit the Al-Kinana hospital in Darat Ezza in Aleppo province. The current situation in and around Aleppo has too much in common with the tactics used by the Russian armed forces during the siege of the Ukrainian city of Debaltseve in February 2015 after the signing of the Minsk package of measures.

Regrettably, our proposals to balance the text of paragraph 4 of the draft resolution were not duly reflected. However, preoccupied by the gravity and urgency of the situation in Syria, the Ukrainian delegation decided to cast its vote in favour of the resolution. Our motivation is driven by our recognition of the dire need to reverse this horrific conflict that has devastated Syria and put the entire Middle East on the brink of a larger regional escalation. That arrangement is obviously long overdue, but what matters is that it reflects a wide understanding that the Syrian people cannot wait any longer and deserve peace and most urgent help. Now that we have a glimmer of new hope in Syria, we need tangible practical steps on the ground.

That having been said, we cannot but underscore the importance of the coming days and weeks, which will be defining ones. The parties to the conflict, both inside and outside of Syria, will have to prove with deeds, not words, that they are committed to meeting their obligations. This time there will be no room for political manoeuvres or excuses. There will be only one way — that of setting arms aside and engaging in a serious political process.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): We too thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing, and we commend him for his determination and optimism in carrying forward a very difficult process. We also commend the United States of America and Russia for steering through the cessation of hostilities, which should have taken effect a few minutes ago.

The backdrop to today's discussions is five years of devastation and failure in Syria. Late last year, the Syrian parties were about as far apart as they have ever been. There have been moments of promise, in particular the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), and subsequent agreements by the International Syria Support Group. Sadly, after each of those moments of promise, we have seen an escalation of fighting as the Syrian Government and its supporters have tried to leverage the situation to their advantage. That has been deeply disturbing and disappointing.

At last, we have an agreement around a cessation of hostilities, which is due to take effect in the coming hours. We welcome that agreement, and were pleased to vote today in support of resolution 2268 (2016), endorsing it. If the cessation of hostilities holds it will be the first time in five years that there has been an agreed pause in the fighting in this bloody civil war. The cessation of hostilities is an important step towards a lasting ceasefire. It gives hope for a reduction in the horrific violence and humanitarian suffering in Syria. If it is to serve a meaningful purpose, parties to the conflict and relevant International Syria Support Group members must demonstrate a sustained commitment to making it work in practice.

We recognize that the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Al-Nusra Front and other Security Council-designated terrorist organizations must continue, but that will inevitably open the risk that the wrong targets may be struck, be it deliberately or inadvertently. That in turn could trigger an unravelling of the cessation of hostilities and a return to widespread conflict. All those who subscribe to this agreement must act with extra caution to prevent such an outcome, and in particular to avoid military activity against non-designated groups, civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Today's resolution affirms the close linkage between a lasting ceasefire and a parallel political process. We hope that the cessation of hostilities agreement will be remembered in history as the beginning of the end of mass violence in Syria. We were pleased, therefore, to hear from Mr. De Mistura that will inter-Syrian talks will resume on 7 March and that that process will be an inclusive one.

We think it right that the Council has today sent a message to the Syrian parties that they must participate in those negotiations on a political transition, and that they must engage in those negotiations in good faith. We have sympathy for those who promote confidence-building measures to build the strength of the platform upon which these negotiations must take place. At the same time, the parties should not insist on preconditions designed to scuttle negotiations before they begin. All those involved in the conflict have a responsibility to bring about and sustain conditions that are conducive to constructive negotiations.

The full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including the one we have adopted today, remains critical. That will require a genuine commitment in the coming days and weeks to ceasing hostilities, in accordance with the terms of the agreement the Council has endorsed today. It also means urgently allowing full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian aid to those who need it. That must include urgently needed medical assistance. We hope we will also see the release of detainees, particularly women, children and the elderly.

Now is when the rubber meets the road, when there must be hard decisions on difficult issues. Now is not the time for political red lines. No side will get everything it wants, and that includes the Syrian Government, the opposition and regional and international supporters. Any viable solution will be imperfect. Any political solution will require compromise. We stand ready to support Mr. De Mistura in his efforts to resume the negotiations in Geneva, and we encourage the Council to do all it can to assist him.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): I would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for being

steadfast and maintaining the hope that we could arrive at the point we have reached today.

Angola supports today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2268 (2016), on a cessation of hostilities in Syria. It is a positive and long-awaited step forward in the quest to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis, and we will continue to support it, especially the confidence-building measures aimed at establishing the conditions necessary for the Syrian-led political transition and dialogue that we in the Council have never ceased calling for.

The establishment of an international task force to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access and a ceasefire in Syria is a timely initiative, given the worsening refugee crisis, the brutality and the loss of the lives of more than a quarter of a million people that we have experienced. Allowing humanitarian agencies to conduct their work, which can be effective only with a cessation of hostilities, is crucial to stemming the growing flow of refugees and the horror of the hostilities that we have witnessed. We sincerely hope that the cessation will hold under the monitoring mechanism and we look forward to a resumption of the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the Special Envoy, now announced for 7 March.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the Special Envoy and wish him every success in the next round of negotiations. We hope that this time the cessation of hostilities will hold and that our focus will shift to building bridges between the various factions in Syria, based on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), and to uniting our efforts to neutralize and further work to eliminate the threat of hostilities from terrorist groups. We may then be able to move forward in order to build momentum for the political track, while encouraging the holding of the ceasefire and a move towards peace and stability in Syria and the region.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of Uruguay, I would like to thank Mr. De Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, not just for his briefing just now but also for his untiring spirit, unceasing efforts and his determination to advance the mission entrusted to him by the Secretary-General and the Security Council. Our thanks include his team as well, and we would like to reiterate our confidence in their work. The Uruguayan delegation would also like to thank the United States and the Russian Federation not only for drafting resolution 2268 (2016), which we have just adopted, but also for their efforts in helping to reach this new stage in a conflict that has already gone on far too long.

On Wednesday, the Government of Uruguay issued a communiqué in which, essentially, we expressed our satisfaction with the recent announcement by the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, and Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, as co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, regarding their signing of an agreement on the entry into force of a cessation of hostilities in Syria. Uruguay believes it is an important step forward in the efforts to put an end to the violence and facilitate humanitarian access in Syria, particularly to besieged areas. In that regard, we would like to call on the parties to respect the commitments they have undertaken and to work to effectively comply with and implement them.

This is a sign of hope for the Syrian people and an essential step towards achieving the effective implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). My delegation voted in favour of the adoption of both resolution 2254 (2015) and resolution 2268 (2016), in the belief that this is a first step towards achieving a lasting ceasefire, which should make it possible to advance a political process that will enable us to end this long conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We would first like to commend and acknowledge the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and to congratulate him on his persistent efforts to work for peace in the terrible conflict that the people of Syria have endured.

Today the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela voted in favour of resolution 2268 (2016), adopted unanimously by the Security Council, in the belief that the text reaffirms the view that a solution to the armed conflict in the country must be political, peaceful and negotiated. My country will support any measures aimed at building confidence and peace. In that regard, we welcome the announcement that a cessation of hostilities is just about to take effect, and we hope that all the parties involved will comply strictly with the agreement. We are pleased that the stakeholders who possess influence on the crisis in Syria are displaying the political will needed to pave the way to the peace that the Syrian people long for. We must act

decisively, and we believe that this quest for a space in which to dialogue that has motivated the Russian and United States delegations is an encouraging sign in support to the efforts of the United Nations, Special Envoy De Mistura and the Security Council.

We would like to express our appreciation and support for the diplomatic efforts to achieve a firm and lasting peace in Syria by all the parties involved. We also welcome Mr. De Mistura's announcement of a resumption of intra-Syrian peace talks scheduled for 7 March, and we hope they will include representatives of every sector and group involved in the conflict and in fighting terrorism. We are aware that identifying shared elements that will enable the groundwork for political negotiations to be laid is a difficult task, but it is a highly important one that will require the commitment of all parties if we are to make concrete progress in helping the people of Syria. We reiterate our call for peace negotiations to continue without preconditions so as to enable the Syrian people to overcome the tragedy of the war that has made them victims of the actions of the armed groups and terrorists operating in their country.

We have said since the beginning that, in order to end the war, the peace process must include all parties and that the Government of President Bashar al-Assad must be recognized in this resolution. Venezuela believes that the legitimate Government of President Al-Assad is a key actor in the political equation of the solution of the conflict. Excluding it from the talks would be condemning them to failure. We also believe that the Security Council has no authority to rule on the legitimacy of the Syrian Government. That is up to the people of Syria alone, and is a matter of respect for the sovereignty of each country and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The people of Syria have their reaffirmed political independence with the assistance of the international community, free of foreign interference and imposed solutions that favour interests other than their own. In that regard, Venezuela reiterates its support for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as its right to self-determination, in accordance with international law, including the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The solution to the humanitarian crisis in Syria is closely linked to the cessation of hostilities. We therefore welcome the fact that in recent days humanitarian assistance has reached at least part of the population in urgent need of food and medicine. We understand that it is not enough and, as we have said, much more must be done in the humanitarian context. Nevertheless, this concern is included in paragraph 6 of the resolution and enjoys the support of the International Syria Support Group. We hope that all parties will allow the end to the siege of hundreds of thousands of people.

As has been agreed, the cessation of hostilities does not apply to terrorist groups that are bleeding Syria dry, such as Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham. It is important to note that the Syrian Government, with the support of the Russian Federation, is tirelessly fighting the aforementioned terrorist organizations and their associates. These terrorist groups threaten international peace and security by expanding their actions to other countries of the Middle East, North Africa and other regions. The international community must provide its full support to the Syrian authorities and all groups fighting the scourge of terrorism. In this context, efforts must be redoubled to prevent the financing, training and transfer of weapons to these groups, as well as their use and encouragement as instruments to overthrow Governments in accordance with the resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly.

Finally, our country will remain committed to achieving a peace in Syria that will bring an end to this dreadful conflict on the basis of a political negotiated solution under the leadership of the Syrian people, its Government and the institutions, thereby guaranteeing the sovereignty and independence of that kindred country.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan De Mistura, for participating by video-teleconference from Geneva.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the Syrian Government has spared no effort to reach a political settlement. It has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment and will pursue that approach on the basis of its desire to end the bloodshed of our Syrian people, restore security and stability and implement the will of the Syrian people. The Syrian Government

has officially announced its acceptance of the cessation of hostilities on the basis of ongoing military counter-terrorism efforts against Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and its affiliates, and other terrorist organizations linked to Al-Qaeda, in accordance with the Russian-American joint declaration, which the Government of Syria considers to be an important step towards a political settlement. We reaffirm our readiness to contribute to the implementation of the cessation of hostilities.

To ensure the successful and timely implementation of the cessation of hostilities, the Government of Syria continues to coordinate with the Russian side to identify the areas and armed groups to be included in the cessation of hostilities as long as it remains in effect. In this regard, we stress once again the importance of controlling the borders, stopping the support provided by certain countries to armed groups and preventing those groups from strengthening their capacities or changing their locations, in order to avoid any eventuality that could undermine the agreement. The Government also reserves the right of its armed forces to respond to any breach of the agreement by those terrorist groups against Syrian citizens or the Syrian armed forces.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic participated in the recent Geneva talks in good faith and full earnest in order to reach a political settlement to the crisis in my country, Syria. Today, I reiterate the readiness of the Government of Syria to participate actively in all sincere efforts to reach a political settlement in which Syrians and Syrians alone shall decide on their future and their choices through a Syrian-led dialogue among Syrians, without foreign intervention. That would safeguard Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, pursuant to the second preambular paragraph of resolution 2268 (2016), just adopted.

On the basis of the foregoing, the ball is again in the court of the other parties, which have yet to prove their good intentions and commitment to facilitating the political settlement of the crisis in Syria — without imposing preconditions on the Syrian people and without interfering in our domestic affairs — by ending their support and justifications for terrorism and abandonging all actions that could hinder political settlement. The Syrians are invited to work on strenthening national reconciliation and to make every effort to defeat terrorism and to rebuild a newSyria, united in its territory and people, and to protect its sovereignty and its national independent stability.

In her statement our colleague, the representative of the United States, said that there are no Al-Nusra Front forces in the town of Daraya, located in a suburb of Damascus. That is incorrect in essence and in practice. There are Al-Nusra Front elements in Daraya. I have circulated to members of the Council a list of the names of hundreds of terrorist fighters who were killed in Syria in 2015. Most are from Al-Nusra Front and Da'esh, and some were killed in Daraya.

I recall that, as the experts of the Council's subsidiary committees are well aware, the real name of the Al-Nusra Front is Al-Qaeda in the Levant. We are talking about the Al-Qaeda organization. Who is the leader of Al-Nusra Front? He is Abu Mohammad Al-Julani, the former deputy of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of Da'esh, who went his separate way and established the Al-Nusra Front in Syria. The Al-Nusra Front is in effect Al-Qaeda, and as its leader Al-Julani has sworn allegiance to Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the head of Al-Qaeda. Al-Nusra Front is thereby affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

Al-Zawahiri appointed a Saudi mufti, Abdullah Al-Muhaysini, to be the mufti for the Al-Nusrah Front in Idlib, with the authority to address issues such issues as the eating of liver and the beheading of people. In other words, the head of an Al-Qaida affiliate has appointed a person who is on the list of designated individuals and entities sponsoring terrorism to be the religious authority in Idlib in Syria. This is the true face of the Al-Nusrah Front, even if some are trying to overlook the facts and have it be considered as an entity working to fight terrorism in Syria.

The Al-Nusrah Front is in fact part of Ahrar Al-Sham, yet another terrorist organization. Created by the Turkish intelligence services, Ahrar Al-Sham works in the north of Syria near the border with Turkey.

Finally, some started to violate resolution 2268 (2016) the moment it was adopted. They have also been saying things that have nothing to do with the contents of the resolution. Therefore, I call upon the representatives of those States that have spoken of my country in an inappropriate manner, in violation of the provisions of the resolution, to start abiding by the resolution in this very Chamber before abiding by it outside.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.